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FOR RELEASE: 30 September 1971

92-299

FROM: Kika de la Garza

WASHINGTON, D. C. -- In response to an inquiry from me, the Department of Agriculture says that careful consideration is being given to the plan of development for the Lower Rio Grande Valley as proposed by a House bill, H. R. 645, which I introduced earlier in the session. I was informed that the proposed legislation and the development plan are at present under review in the Executive Branch. The Agriculture Department's report on the legislation will be delayed until the review is completed.

Just a year ago, the Soil Conservation Service completed a study and outlined a systematic approach to solving the Valley's flooding and drainage problem. If the project is carried out, I expect it to be of great value to the entire Rio Grande Valley. It should result in a reduction of flood damage to rural and urban areas, and for the first time will provide critically needed adequate outlets for surface and sub-surface drainage. My bill authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to help state and local organizations carry out the development plan proposed by the Soil Conservation Service.

A three-phase plan was suggested by the Soil Conservation Service, with much of the necessary work to be done by local interests and some of it requiring help from the Federal government. Local governmental bodies in South Texas have pledged their support and cooperation in the project.

Under Phase One of the plan, a system of flood water channels will be installed with Federal assistance.

Phase Two calls for local watershed protection systems to be initiated and carried out by local groups, with Federal assistance. This work can be done only after the floodwater channels proposed in Phase One are completed.

Phase Three will consist of intensified conservation land treatment throughout the Valley to improve our farm and ranch lands. These improvements, resulting in effective irrigation and water management, will enable landowners to install sub-surface drains which will cure their salinity problems. The work will be done by local landowners, with the Soil Conservation Service providing technical and engineering assistance.

All this would be good for our entire area, resulting in higher sustained agricultural earnings and further enhancing our economy. I hope the current review of the project in the Executive Branch will result in a favorable decision, and that we continue to enlarge on this to eventually do the same for all of South Texas.

* * *

WELCOME VISITORS! -- Something that affects the economy of South Texas, located as we are on the border with Mexico, is international tourism. I have recently been in touch with the Department of Commerce about its program for encouraging foreign travel in the United States, and have received information about two developments of interest to our area.

One is that the U. S. Travel Service is launching an exciting promotion in Mexico beginning December 1. The seven-story inflated sphere which was used at Expo'70 in Osaka, Japan, and during this travel season in Tokyo, is being moved to Mexico City. The sphere is equipped with 360-degree screen, and on it will be shown the Spanish version of the great Walt Disney movie, "America the Beautiful." Results to date of use of this unique sphere have been spectacular. It will provide the hard core for a dynamic promotion of travel to the United States, and our area will benefit.

The second development is that USTS regional directors from around the world, including Bill Tappe from Mexico City, are being accorded an opportunity to meet with state tourism directors in the United States. I am assured that they will be given a clear understanding of Texas travel attractions. With the help of our state travel officials, plans will be made to promote more travel from abroad--and, of particular interest to us, from Mexico.

As always, South Texans can be depended on to have the welcome mat out.

* * *

SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE -- Here are two items of special interest to our older citizens:

A worker who is 62 or older can get Social Security benefits if he is laid off, even though he plans to return to work later. He will get a check for any month in which he does not earn more than \$140, no matter how much he makes the remainder of the year. And a worker who is 72 or older can collect benefits regardless of how much he earns.

Under the law, a person who drops medicare's medical insurance twice may not enroll again. This rule was invoked in denying enrollment of a man whose medical insurance had been canceled twice for failure to pay premiums. But it would have applied even if he had voluntarily dropped out twice.

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VISITORS -- Visiting my office this week were Mr. Domingo Gonzalez, of Brownsville; Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Kethley, and Mr. Horacio Somohano, all from McAllen; and Mr. Tony Ramirez, of Harlingen.

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